

**City of Belmont
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING JUNE 6, 2012
MINUTES**

The regular meeting of the Belmont Parks & Recreation Commission of June 6, 2012 was called to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Belmont City Hall Council Chambers.

I. ROLL CALL

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Wright, Commissioner (C) Eric Sullivan, Cheechov, Youth Commissioner (YC) Bartee, C Wong, Block, and YC Zakeri

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Kevin Sullivan and Commissioner Bortoli

STAFF PRESENT: Parks and Recreation Director (PRD) Gervais and Secretary (S) Saggau

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

C Wong moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of May 2, 2012. Vote 7-0 in favor.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION/COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Lucy Buchan-del Cardaye requested middle school activities be provided at Barrett Community Center. She suggested providing an open gym and volleyball facilities. She added she would like to be involved in the discussions on plans for the Barrett Community Center.

IV. AGENDA AMENDMENTS

None.

V. OLD BUSINESS

a. McDougal Park

PRD Gervais gave a review of McDougal Park, its history and the issues concerning the park. The park was acquired by the City in the 1980's and it included an access easement that provided access for maintenance and for the public during non-school hours. This agreement also gave Charles Armstrong School exclusive use of the fields during school hours. Some residents raised concerns about limited access to the park and formed a group called Neighborhoods First. An Ad-Hoc Committee was formed out of the Parks & Recreation Commission that met a few times

with residents and the school. Not much progress was made but the City did improve the picnic area.

Stakeholders include the residents, Charles Armstrong School, youth sports and the City. PRD Gervais noted the Commission has received some emails from residents highlighting their concerns about the park. Their main concern is the limited access to the park. There have been requests for more uses other than athletic fields such as playgrounds and walking paths.

PRD Gervais explained the access restrictions would be very difficult and costly to change. He noted that the school needs security on campus. He added it would be difficult to deal with conflicts that could occur between field users and students. He explained athletic fields are needed for the youth sports programs. PRD Gervais noted there have been comparisons to Cipriani Park and School but Cipriani Park has a separate entrance.

PRD Gervais displayed a photo of a play structure that was located at McDougal Park. It was in poor condition and was removed. It was not replaced as it was not a good location for a play structure. The City did make some improvements to the picnic area and would like to add a play feature to the site.

PRD Gervais responded to Commission questions:

- The steep slope by the driveway belongs to the school and it would require the school's permission to allow steps there to provide a separate access.
- The costs to maintain the field at McDougal Park is not shared with the school.
- Staff is not aware of any other alternative avenue to provide access. Private property and another school site border the park. Staff could check with the school but anticipate they will have security concerns as well.
- Students at Charles Armstrong School use the field during the day.
- The Agreement was entered in 1985. Staff will forward a copy of the Agreement to the Commission to review.
- There is limited space in the picnic area for a play structure. The shed on the site stores equipment for softball and serves as a snack shack.
- Staff will check if there is a sign that explains the access restrictions at the park.

Chuck Horton, member of Neighborhoods First, stated when Charles Armstrong School purchased the school site they had the option to buy the park and questioned why they would buy it if they could use and control it for nothing. He expressed concern that this neighborhood is short on park space. He stated what the City needs to do is get behind a movement to get rid of the agreement and hire a land use attorney to get this solved.

Debbie Vielbaum, Director of Admissions and Community Relations for Charles Armstrong School, said she was present to listen to the neighborhood concerns. She explained the school serves children with special needs for grades 1-8 and have been in operation for 44 years; 28 years in Belmont. The school does use the park during school hours for their outdoor education. Their hours of use are 8:30-3:30 during the school year and 8:30-12:30 during summer school. She invited Commissioners to visit the school.

Peggy Allen – presented photos of the tot lot at Hastings Park. She expressed concern that this item was on the agenda and that some neighbors that would like to be involved were unable to attend on short notice. She would like to see McDougal Park renovated and would like a tot lot and walking trails to bring the neighbors together. She supported points made in emails by Robert Mayer and Barry Lake. She noted it is not clear to residents that the park is available in August. She added a survey was done a few years ago and there was intense interest in the park being improved.

C Cheechov agreed that the restricted hours does not seem fair to residents and there has to be another solution to provide more access to the public.

YC Bartee stated the City is stuck between a rock and a hard place. He acknowledged the school needs security but the community maintains the park and has little access to it. He agreed a solution needs to be found.

C Wong noted it is a complex issue because of the past agreement that was put in place and the need to balance the needs between the community and the school. He added it would take an intense investment in money and time to make major changes in the current situation. He said he understands the need for the community to have a park but sees the school has requirements as well.

C Block noted there has been a good relationship between the city and school and believes the two groups would be willing to work together to come up with solution. He questioned the Agreement created in 1985 and if there are any others like it in other communities. He agreed it is a very complicated issue but wondered if there is some way the space can be shared during high use hours.

YC Zakeri agreed with the other Commissioners that it is a complicated issue. She added if the City pays to maintain it citizens should have the right to use it. She said the best solution would be to work with Charles Armstrong to come up with a creative solution.

C Eric Sullivan noted access is more important to the citizens than development of the park. He explained he would have less incentive to improve the park if it is only available for residents part-time. He suggested the school might be more interested in discussions if significant improvements were made to the site.

C Wright stated she would like to reconvene the Ad-Hoc Committee and have representatives of the Commission, Neighborhood Group, Charles Armstrong School and the City work together. She noted while researching play equipment for Davey Glen Park she discovered there is some natural play equipment that is less expensive and that may fit at McDougal as it would not take a lot of space.

C Cheechov suggested that this item be continued to the next Commission meeting. C Eric Sullivan noted he would like the opportunity to talk to C Bortoli and former C Warden who

served on the Ad-Hoc Committee in 2008 prior to the next meeting to find out what the issues were in 2008. There was Commission consensus to put this on the next agenda.

b. Davey Glen Park Project

PRD Gervais reported at the last meeting he reviewed the background on Davey Glen Park. Since then Ad-Hoc Committee members Kevin Sullivan, Susan Wright and Thaddeus Block met with staff and Landscape Architect John Cahalan. They had one meeting onsite where they discussed ideas for Areas B and C.

PRD Gervais noted he has put the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) on hold until it is decided what the project includes.

PRD Gervais explained a significant amount of time was spent to develop the park design. He noted it has been through the process and reviewed by the Commission numerous times. The Planning Commission and City Council have also reviewed and appreciated the design. He added good projects eventually get funded and that it took a long time to get the bike bridge funded but it did get completed. The question he presented was does the City want to retain the existing design and look for additional funding source or go ahead with the project and look at developing a plan for Area B. If the City moves ahead with a smaller project the Landscape Architect would be reengaged to develop details for Area B.

PRD Gervais added the Ad-Hoc Committee did discuss options for Area B and if the play structures should be traditional or natural based play features. He displayed pictures of these options for the Commission to view.

In response to C Block's questions PRD Gervais said that the funds that are set aside for this park could be reallocated to another project but these funds can only be used for park development projects.

Michelle Ladcani spoke in favor of completing this park and noted there is a lot of neighborhood support for this park. She would like to see the project proceed with the available funding. She requested it have a play structure and would like something similar to Semeria Park where families gather. She spoke in favor of natural play features or a traditional structure; anything that children could play on.

Jim Callan agreed with Ms. Ladcani's comments. He would like the project to proceed now with the funds available.

YC Zakeri stated that people want this park and we should do what we can with funds we have available. She was in favor of natural based play features but was okay with traditional too. She noted the park space is not that big so the natural based features may be best alternative for Davey Glen. She does not want to postpone any longer as cost will go up.

C Block acknowledged that a lot of work was done to create the plan for the park and the original plan was an ideal park. He noted the reality is there is no other funding source identified and the neighborhood is dramatically underserved with park space. Following the Ad-Hoc Committee meetings he understands Area A must be retained to provide ADA access, Area B

could be retained with a play structure and if enough funding is left over there could be some type of grassy area in Area C. He spoke in favor of a natural play feature and that the project proceeds with available funds.

YC Bartee stated the City needs to act now and use the budget available. He suggested maybe there could be access left to Area D so that improvements can be made if more funding becomes available. He added the neighborhood needs a play structure.

C Cheechov spoke in support of completing Areas A & B. She was in favor of the climbing rocks and placing some in the area behind Area B. She added it may be years before the recession is over and it is unlikely there would be more funds available.

C Eric Sullivan noted the park site is a difficult location and that half the budget needs to go towards providing ADA access. He expressed respect for the experience and the patience that funds can be found but to represent the public fairly he preferred to go ahead with available funds.

C Wright stated she agrees with the Commission's comments. She suggested moving forward and making sure that the Landscape Architect hired is knowledgeable about play features. She spoke in favor of natural play features as they would fit more aesthetically at the site. She added it may be possible to put in nature trails later.

C Cheechov moved that the Commission proceed with using A and B, play structure being on B, and if it is entirely possible to give that area behind, that would be Area C, to this more natural type of play things.

C Eric Sullivan proposed a substitute motion that the Commission recommend that the Parks & Recreation Department redesign Davey Glen to fit within existing funding resources allocated to it.

C Wong questioned if C Cheechov's motion included Areas A, B and C or Areas A and B. C Cheechov said it covers Areas A and B; the rocks would be in Area C. C Wright explained these rocks would require fall zones and need to be on a flat surface and the intent was to place the rocks in Area B instead of a play structure.

C Block stated he would like to second C Eric Sullivan's motion as it was very clear.

YC Bartee proposed an amendment to C Sullivan's motion to state *modify Option 3*. This amendment was accepted.

The Commission voted on the following motion:

C Eric Sullivan moved, seconded by C Block, that the Commission recommends that the Parks and Recreation Department modify Option 3 to Davey Glen Park to fit within existing budget. Vote 7-0 in favor.

The Commission discussed the type of play equipment and their preferences for Area B. A poll was taken on their preferred play equipment. Commissioners that prefer nature based play equipment included YC Zakeri, C Block, C Wong, C Eric Sullivan, YC Bartee & C Wright. C Cheechov preference was for traditional play equipment.

PRD Gervais said staff will engage a Landscape Architect to draw some options for Area B for the Commission to vote on. He will check on the status of the contract with Landscape Architect Brent Cottong.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

a. July Commission Meeting

PRD Gervais stated that the next Park & Recreation Commission meeting falls on the 4th of July. Alternatives are to cancel the July meeting and meet in August or move the July meeting to July 11th. Staff's recommendation was to meet in August.

C Cheechov stated she would prefer to meet on July 11th as she is unable to attend the meeting in August as it has been the traditional time off and she scheduled vacation.

C Wong moved, seconded by C Eric Sullivan, that the Commission skip July and meet in August.

Vote: In Favor: Wong, Block, Wright & Eric Sullivan
Opposed: Cheechov
Abstain: Bartee & Zakeri

VII. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

A. Questions and Comments

PRD Gervais reported the following:

- The bid opening for the Cipriani Dog Park Project was successful and that the Contractor would start the project the next week.
- Staff has been working with School District and the field issues at their construction projects.
- City Clerk Terri Cook provided an email explaining abstentions which was forwarded to the Commission. There was still some question on that issue if it is a simple majority or a majority of the body that staff will check on.
- Staff is working on the transition of Barrett Studios. The southern wing will be available for community programs and improvements need to be made to the rooms. The middle wing will remain as Artist's studios.
- Trail work continues and weekday evenings are scheduled for this work.
- The City received a \$25,000 block grant for improvements to the Twin Pines Senior & Community Center. This will be used towards painting, carpet and furniture replacement.

In response to C Wright's questions PRD Gervais explained that televising the Parks & Recreation Commission meetings has not been decided on yet. He noted there is a movement to fix the website and it may be included in that process.

B. Future Agenda Items

McDougal Park
Belmont Sports Complex
Dog Park Update
Davey Glen Park
General Plan Update
Barrett Community Center

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

Jonathan Gervais
Parks & Recreation Director